

VZCZCXR05954

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV

DE RUEHLB #0560 1141558

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 231558Z APR 08

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1633

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2467

RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000560

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER

DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER FINR SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SHEIKH RAHAL SAYS MAJORITY OF SHIA ARE MODERATE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SEPARATING SHIA FROM HIZBALLAH

-----

¶11. (C) Independent Shia activist Lokman Slim, in preparation for May 3-9 visit to Washington by a delegation of moderate Shia, introduced a member of the delegation, Sheikh Maarouf Rahal, to the Charge on April 23. Sheikh Rahal, an advisor to Mufti of Tyre Sayyed Ali al-Amin, has been a practicing Sharia judge since 1991 in Baabda, Beirut, Byblos, and Kesawan.

¶12. (C) Rahal explained that not all Shia are Hizballah, and in fact, the majority of Shia are moderate. However, he added, they need a strong base to refer to in order to break their silence. He remarked that it is unusual for the Shia to be leaning towards Iran these days, as historically Shia throughout the region have paid primary allegiance to their states.

¶13. (C) Arguing that the strongest and most-effective defense against Hizballah comes from a sheikh, Rahal said moderate clerics are powerful weapons because they are considered experts and can fight Hizballah using their enemy's own rhetoric. "Light has to be spread where and how darkness was spread," he said. In the fight against terroris, Rahal posited, the Shia grasp this struggle bet when they are shown by their own sheikhs the alternate, purer vision of Islam and Shiaism.

U.S. ASSISTANCE VALUABLE,  
WHEN NOT CREDITED TO HIZBALLAH

-----

¶14. (C) Rahal noted that, while he was appreciative of U.S. assistance to the south following the July 2006 war, he is concerned that the aid indirectly helps Hizballah. Sometimes aid is funneled through NGOs, some of which are linked to Hizballah, before it reaches the people. Hizballah has even taken credit for money disbursed by GOL which was provided by international donors, he added.

¶15. (C) The U.S. should continue providing aid to southern Lebanon, but through moderate Shia who are not linked with Hizballah. Rahal gave the example of a hawaza (Shia seminary) where he teaches. Run by Sheikh Amin, this school would be an appropriate funding partners because it is grooming the next generation of moderate Shia clerics and giving them to tools to refute extremist Islamic idealogues.

¶6. (C) Rahal relayed that Sheikh Amin often mentions that Shia are faced with two choices, or axes, to follow: American or Iranian. Amin and his followers recognize that Iran acts out of self-interest -- destroying other countries in order to achieve their own agendas. When faced with this choice, moderate Shia will side with the Americans. He admitted that an independent path is also attractive, as it speaks to specific Shia interests but also runs in parallel with the U.S.'s shared interest in sovereignty, democracy, freedom, and prosperity.

Comment

-----

¶7. (C) This was our first meeting with Sheikh Rahal. He joins this Washington delegation in order to represent the views of his influential leader, Sheikh Amin of Tyre. His input, as a religious leader, will nicely complement some of the other intellectual and media figures that Slim has brought together for this Washington visit. Rahal seemed open to working with the USG on future cooperative projects and he relayed an invitation to the Charge from Sheikh Amin to visit him in Tyre. End Comment.

SISON